



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

DRIVER CHARGED IN DEADLY SMUGGLING CAR CRASH *ICE STORM targets criminal smuggling organizations*

DES MOINES, Iowa—The driver of a van carrying nine other illegal aliens that was involved in a deadly collision with a tractor-trailer truck March 4 was charged in federal court Thursday following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Carlos Alberto Vasquez-Vasquez, 22, of Mexico, was charged with transporting illegal aliens during an initial appearance before U.S. Magistrate Judge Ross Walters.

“This tragedy is the latest example of how dangerous it is for people to place their lives in the hands smugglers,” said Resident Agent-in-Charge Estela Biesemeyer of the ICE Des Moines office. “Smugglers value a dollar more than they value human life. They view their human passengers as nothing more than cargo to be turned into profit.”



Wreckage of the smuggling vehicle.

According to a criminal complaint filed in court, Vasquez-Vasquez was driving the 1993 Nissan Quest minivan at the time of the accident, in which three occupants were killed, and the other seven were hospitalized for their injuries. The illegal aliens in the van paid between \$1,000 and \$2,000 each to be smuggled into the U.S. from Mexico in late February. Smugglers kept them in a “safe house” near Lukeville, Ariz., until Vasquez-Vasquez picked them up March 2. They were on their way to Chicago when the accident occurred west of Des Moines on Interstate 80 near Earlham, Iowa.

The Des Moines ICE office has so far apprehended 93 illegal aliens discovered in nine smuggling vehicles in fiscal year 2005. During the previous year, this office apprehended 193 illegal aliens in 12 smuggling loads. All vehicles were encountered on or near Interstates 80 or 35 in central Iowa.

In recent years, human smuggling gangs have descended on the Southwest border, building a lucrative industry by charging people substantial fees to be brought into the United States illegally. To address this growing threat, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement launched Operation ICE Storm in the Phoenix, Ariz., and the surrounding area. ICE Storm is an unprecedented multi-agency initiative to dismantle organized criminal outfits that have made human smuggling a profitable but bloody business venture.

Since its beginning in October 2003, ICE Storm has led to prosecuting 308 defendants on a wide range of violations, including: human smuggling, money laundering, kidnapping, hostage-taking, narcotics smuggling and possession, and illegal weapons possession. More than \$7.2 million in criminal currency has been seized from smuggling organizations, along with 160 weapons, including: handguns, AK-47s, and SKS military assault rifles. Furthermore, 6,061 illegal aliens have been apprehended in the Phoenix area.

In addition, ICE Storm has been credited with a significant drop in crime in the Phoenix area, with area police pointing to significant declines in the city's murder rate, sexual assaults, aggravated assaults, robberies, weapons seizures, and smuggling-related violence.

NOTE: For JPEG digital image files of the wrecked smuggling van, please contact Tim Counts at 952-853-2602 or via e-mail at Tim.Counts@dhs.gov.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.